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RETAIL PRODUCE MANUAL

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CUSTOMER SERVICE FOR RETAIL PRODUCE DEPARTMENTS

MARKETING BULLETIN NO. 32
Agricultural Marketing Service and
Federal Extension Service
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

This is the sixth in a group of bulletins the Department is issuing on handling produce in retail food stores. The five earlier bulletins are listed on the last page of this publication.

These bulletins present step-by-step instructions that will help retail produce managers and clerks save time and money in produce handling and will enable them to offer consumers produce of better quality with less loss from waste and spoilage. The publications in this group will also be helpful to specialists of the Cooperative Extension Service and State Departments of Agriculture in their marketing work with retail stores.

These bulletins summarize the results of recent research by the Agricultural Marketing Service looking toward improvement in handling of produce in retail stores. The material in this report is based on Marketing Research Report No. 501, "Display Location and Customer Service in Retail Produce Departments."

The research is part of a broad program to improve efficiency in marketing of agricultural products, reduce marketing costs, and bring fresher products, with less waste and spoilage, to the consumer.

The retail store operator is the last link in the long chain of produce handlers from farm to consumer. Unless the retailer offers fresh produce in a satisfactory manner to the consumer, direct or indirect losses may reflect back through each handler to the grower.

This chapter should be inserted in a ring binder immediately following Marketing Bulletin No. 14 on packaging and price marking produce in retail produce departments.

July 1964

CUSTOMER SERVICE

For Retail Produce Departments

WHAT IS IT?

Customer service is waiting on the customer, taking care of her questions and problems.

All types of departments have a need for this service.

Prepack	With prepackaged and prepriced produce some special orders or shopping assistance is often required.
Bulk	In bulk produce departments many items must be weighed and priced for the customer at time of sale. This is also called customer service.
In the produce department	Some supermarkets weigh produce in the sales area.
At the checkout	Others weigh produce at the checkout counter.

GOOD CUSTOMER RELATIONS COME FIRST!

HANDLING INQUIRIES

Be polite.

Be courteous.

Be prompt.

(Don't try to do several jobs at one time.)

If your customer just wants information, give it.

Know your produce.

Don't give bad advice.

Don't be negative.

Don't say, "I don't know," say:

"I suggest you try. . ."

If she wants to know where an item is, TAKE her to it -- don't point.

HOW TO HANDLE A SPECIAL ORDER

Special orders occur most often with prepackaged merchandise but can occur in any kind of a produce department.

Keep track

If your prepackaged produce department gets too many calls for a particular item, check your package sizes and selections. You may be failing to meet customer needs.

The prime causes of a large number of special orders are:

Size of packages

(1) Prepacked packages too large (or small) for the customer. Change the pack or put out a greater variety of sizes. Possibly use catch weight packages with varying sizes.

Out of stock

(2) The display case or shelf may be empty or the supply may be so low the customers have a very poor selection.

Something special

(3) Customers have been encouraged to think they get special consideration with special orders.

The quality and condition of produce on display should be as good as that which the customer gets in a special order. It's fine to make a customer feel she is getting good service, but letting her think she is getting something special that she cannot get on the counter can defeat the purpose of self-service.

Provide a bell for times when no clerk is on the floor.

(1) Put it at the end of the traffic pattern.

(2) Mark it clearly.

(3) Answer it promptly.

HOW TO WEIGH IN THE PRODUCE DEPARTMENT

1. Locate the weighing station at the end of the typical produce department shopping route to prevent congestion.

2. Locate the weighing station so customers will not block either the aisle or a display. If the station is in an aisle, the aisle should be wide enough to accommodate the station and the customer shopping carts, plus room for other customers to pass.

3. Use a fixed workplace with the scale or scales in one location. This eliminates the travel of the clerk from customer to customer or scale to scale, and permits him to serve more customers.

4. Eliminate barriers between customer and scale. If shopping carts or boxes block the customer from the scale, the clerk has to move to the customer to obtain the package and back to the customer with the weighed and priced package. It should be possible for the shopping cart to be parked adjacent to the service counter.

5. Provide a shelf beside the scale to hold packages. The shelf permits the clerk to dispose of the package without waiting for the customer.

6. Work surface and scale platter should be at a convenient height, between 36 and 39 inches from the floor, with the scale dial above the platter and corrected for parallax (so that no errors are made in reading the scale). This keeps the clerk's hands at a comfortable level and does not obstruct his view of the dial.

7. Locate tools, materials, and necessary equipment close to or directly in front of the clerk, with tools pre-positioned whenever possible. Keep extra bags readily accessible for use when customers bring unbagged items to the scale in their hands. Place a waste can at the station.

8. Provide a workspace for odd jobs. Because of the relatively small amount of time required for serving the customer, there is considerable idle time unless jobs are provided which the clerk can do between customers.

WEIGHING IN THE PRODUCE DEPARTMENT

Be polite, greet customers.

Inspect every bag--don't guess; see if low-priced items are on top of high-priced ones.

Call out the price so the customer knows what she's being charged.

Bag the item for the customer if necessary.

Write the price clearly.

Staple the bag closed.

Place bag so it won't be crushed in the shopping cart.

Keep your workplace clean.

HOW TO WEIGH AT THE CHECKOUT

1. Locate a low-platform scale at working level so the cashier does not have to turn or reach to use the scale. Be sure the scale dial is visible to the customer. Angle reading devices are available for most scales.

2. Locate this scale so it does not interfere with the regular checkout operation and so the cashier does not have to reach over the scale. Produce weighing is a minor part of checkout operations, and scales should not be located so as to delay the major operations.

3. Use a scale which has an easily read dial. Most modern service scales have easy-to-read dials with little parallax; they have fairly complete price charts and need no manual adjustment to change price charts. However, these factors may be serious problems with old or obsolete scales.

4. Provide a supply of small bags for bagging produce items. Produce items may be wet or need additional protection, and special bags are often necessary.

5. Provide adequate price-chart information for the produce to be weighed and priced. With many cashiers involved in pricing produce, price information at each checkout is necessary.

6. Use a register which eliminates presorting. A register with motorized commodity keys permits the cashier to ring up items as they are presented to her.

WEIGHING PRODUCE AT THE CHECKOUT

Weighing produce at the checkout costs less than weighing in the produce department and it makes the job of scheduling your help easier.

Train the cashiers--

When you have a new item show it to the cashiers.

Explain how it is priced.

Keep price lists up to date, legible, understandable.

(Most cashiers know what a cucumber is, but do they know the difference between a MacIntosh apple and a Rome? Show them, especially part timers.)

Have cashiers watch for low-priced items on top of a bag, high-priced items underneath. (Just dump out bag and weigh each item separately.)

Have cashiers inspect

every bag--

don't guess what's

in it.

ADVANTAGES OF WEIGHING IN THE PRODUCE DEPARTMENT

1. Equipment costs are less, and fewer checkouts are required.
2. Clerk specializing in produce pricing is less apt to make errors.
3. Bottlenecks at the checkout counter are reduced.
4. More customer contact in the produce department is maintained.
5. The customer knows the exact price of purchase before checkout and can more readily check the prices on the register slip.
6. Produce is protected, at least in part, during the shopping tour.
7. Clerk at the weighing station in the produce section helps police the displays.

ADVANTAGES OF WEIGHING AT THE CHECKOUT

1. Customer has only one stop to make.
2. There is less congestion and faster shopping in the produce department.
3. Loss of clerk time due to "delays for customer" is reduced in the produce department.
4. Labor is saved because the individual produce items are not physically priced and often are not bagged.
5. The stapling of bags is eliminated.
6. Some space may be released for additional produce displays.
7. Scheduling help in the produce department is simplified.

SO WHERE SHOULD I WEIGH MY PRODUCE?

The costs of weighing produce are all on the side of checkout weighing. The costs were one-fourth as much as for weighing in the produce department.

However, all of the factors discussed above need to be taken into account in determining the system to be used. If a change is to be made, it is, of course, important that customers be fully informed in advance.

Another factor that must be considered is the size of the store. Larger markets can, by packaging or unit pricing selected items, maintain a fairly steady production load for the produce weighing station. Small stores, on the other hand, have a much more difficult time keeping personnel at the produce weighing station and have relatively fewer problems with checkout bottlenecks.

Finally, the more packaging that is done before the produce reaches the store, or is done in the store backroom, the less concern there is with the weighing function. So base your decision on your store and your methods.

BUT HOWEVER YOU DO IT--DO IT WELL!

SOME THOUGHTS ON USE OF THE SCALE

Use a scale with an easy-to-read dial.

Check your scale for zero each time you start.

Have a scale man check it regularly.

Keep supplies, etc., away from the platter. They rub on the platter and can cause you to lose money.

Keep your scale clean and level.

Arrange it so the customer can see too.

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Copies of this publication may be purchased from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 20402. The price is 20 cents each.

Copies of the first five chapters of this Retail Produce Manual may also be purchased. The prices are as follows:

Marketing Bulletin No. 2. Organization of the Work Area for Handling Produce in Retail Stores. 15 cents.

Marketing Bulletin No. 3. Ordering, Receiving, and Storage of Produce in Retail Stores. 5 cents.

Marketing Bulletin No. 4. Trimming Produce in Retail Stores. 25 cents.

Marketing Bulletin No. 11. Management and Scheduling of a Retail Produce Department. 20 cents.

Marketing Bulletin No. 14. Packaging and Price Marking Produce in Retail Stores. 25 cents.

In quantities of 100 copies or more, the price per copy is discounted 25 percent. Cash or money order should accompany your order to the Superintendent of Documents.

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